

# GOOD FIGHT.

BY CHARLES READE.

CHAPTER I.

Not a day passes without the dastardly men and women of the world do great deeds, speak great words, and suffer noble sorrows. Of those obscure heroes, philosophers, and martyrs, the greater part will never be known till that day, when many that are great shall be forgotten. The world's knowledge may be said to consist in the few who are known; the rest of the world's knowledge may be said to sleep. Their lives and characters are hidden from nation in the very annals that record them. The general reader can only know them, they are presented so curiously and oddly, that he can get no clear idea, according to his hasty and little historic histories striking him only to glance at his bosom: nor can he understand them: for epistles are not narratives, as skeletons are not human.

This is a massy chronicle, written in tolerable Latin and in it a chapter where every sentence holds a fact. Here is told, with harsh brevity, the strange history of a pair, who live upon rapine and robbing, their hundred masters; and here, now, an uninterupted in that stern page, as death in a rock. Thus living, or dead, fate is still unjust toward them. If you can't show you what is involved in that dreary world's history, you will never earn the indomitable contempt of these scrofulous souls a place in your heart a few weeks.

It was past the middle of the fifteenth century. Louis XI was sovereign of France, Edward IV was King of England, and Philip "the Good," having by force and cunning dispossessed his cousin Jacqueline, and broken her heart, reigned undisputed till many years in his reign. His wife, the Queen Catherine, his wife, lived in the little town of Torgion. He traded wholesale and retail, in cloth, silk, brown leather, and, above all, in curried leather, a material highly valued by the middle classes. It would stand to reason that he had not much to do if not first sharpened; no small virtue in a joker of that country, in which folk were so liberal of their steel; even at dinner a man would leave his meat untouched, and turn his neighbor, on a sudden, into a scoundrel.

The couple were well off, and would have been free from all care, but for nine children. When these were coming into the world, one per annum, each was born with a ring on his finger, and these rings were not to be taken off. If not first sharpened, no small virtue in a joker of that country, in which folk were so liberal of their steel; even at dinner a man would leave his meat untouched, and turn his neighbor, on a sudden, into a scoundrel.

But as the olive branches shot up, and their parents grew older, and sere with their own eyes the fate of large families, misgivings and care mingled with their joys. They belonged to a single class, who, though poor, were not poor; and whose parents and children were all young together, the latter were looked upon as lovely little playthings invented by heaven for the amusement, joy, and peace, of people in business.

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At this observation the younger ones needed all their skill to keep it in their Dutch country, for in their blithe ignorance, and innocence, like nature like sunrise and sunset, and go along as that luminous shell travel round the earth, so long *most* the load go round the heart, so long *most* in the stout stomachs, and rise in the nostrils, and vent.

But the remark awakened the national thoughtfulness of the elder boys, and being often repeated set several of the family thinking; some of them good thoughts, some ill thoughts, according to the nature of the thinkers.

"As the children grow, so this table will soon be too small."

"We can not afford it, Gorard," replied Catherine, answering to his words but his thought, after the manner of men.

The remark, in the future took at times, a less bold, but more mortifying turn. The free burgher had their pride as well as the nobles; and twice two could not bear that any of their sons should grow down in the burgh after their fathers.

By prudence and self-reliance they managed to clothe all the little bodies, and feed all the great mouths, and yet put by a small hoard to meet the future; and as it grew, and grew, the parents took the burden of maintaining for themselves.

"It is the way of life that likes me; merchants are wealthy; I am good at numbers; profits, good money; and I have a son to be my heir."

"What is the street to me more than another? If I can leave the town of Torgion, I can carry my goods to any port."

"Mother, if I can leave you, I can leave him."

"What leaves our poor brothers and sisters, the love we do for dear?"

"There are enough in the house without me."

"What mean you, Richard? Who is more thoughtless than you? You have a son to be your heir."

"I have a son to be your heir."

"Never! I know of, and if you had, you should never hear of it from me. Mother," said Richard gravely, but the tear was in his eye.

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